

614 Gabon have given priority to recreating, the regrouping of villages being supposed, in their view, to take place as a function of the regrouping of the meyoñ.

[84] The ayoñ includes all the patrilineal descendants of a common ancestor, the illegitimate children of girls belonging to the ayoñ, and 57 adopted ones. The ayoñ has a name, a tattoo mark (ndan), often certain prohibitions (bityi, biki), and perhaps a totem. The most strict exogamy is the rule. All members call themselves brothers (bobenyañ).

Although there was, properly speaking, no real political division corresponding to the ayoñ, nor any organized chiefship—explicable particularly in view of the very scattered settlement pattern of the members—clan sentiment was, and still is, very strong. Periodical meetings, bisulan, bring ayoñ members together, presided over by the eldest (ntñl) of the senior lineage (mvòk, ayòm) (3). The custom

3. Ayòm probably has the same root as nnòm, pl. beyòm = male; it should be remarked that the ayòm is often designated by the name of a female ancestor.

[82] of these bisulan has recently been revived /46/; first in the Cameroons, where the native authority was reorganized in 1945-48 along clan lines, then in Gabon, where the meyoñ are in an advanced state of disintegration, above all in the south.

[36] An ayoñ, whose villages separated one from the other by villages of other clans sometimes extend over several hundred kilometers, is divided into segments (mvòk) that include the descendants of the brothers, or rather the sons, of the clan ancestor, then /is divided/ into lineages (bisa, meyòm) derived from the descendants of the sons of the ancestor of the segment. The longer the genealogy (mvam, nlañ bimvam; meba'a), the more vague these categorical differences become: in one place mvòk is used for what is called ésa nearby and ayòm further away. But, except in southern Gabon, the genealogies are still well preserved, and the majority of adults can trace their relationship, if not to the clan ancestor himself, at least to his lineage. The teaching of these genealogies, which was the core of the traditional training of boys, is dying out with the spread of schooling, but children still know at least the genealogy of their village-family (jal, dzal; nda bbr).

769 The figure was placed on the new group's first family altar, and so afterwards were the skulls of the founder and of the benya bôd of succeeding generations. A full biéri basket was the sign of a group's antiquity, which doubtless implied prestige more than genuine authority, yet nevertheless represented the nearest approach to political authority that existed in the Fang group, particularly if one takes into account the fact that officials of interclan associations were chosen from among the owners of many skulls, whence prestige extended to a large number of mvôk or meyom. The prestige of the living was exerted through the authority of the dead.

[554] Skulls were, indeed, the seat or receptacle of the individual's capacity for action (we must remember that bo = to make, boo = brain), and the use of skulls in the practice of magic was not confined to ancestral skulls only: the skulls of enemies killed in battle or sacrificed in anthropophagous ceremonies before or afterward were preserved, and so were those stolen from neighbors. In the same way the skulls of the kinds of animals desired were used for hunting rites. However, it seems that a distinction was made between family skulls and outsiders' skulls, only the first having a place in the éwolé biéti and appearing in family rites. The power of the skulls was increased by sprinkling them with sacrificial blood.

[722] When a youth reached nya môtô age he had to learn to recognize his ancestors so as to be able to ask for their help when the occasion arose. Their skulls were shown to him until he could identify them individually and put them in the correct genealogical order. When he was able to do this, he was given a brew of the narcotic herb alan, then spent a night in the biéti hut, facing the skulls, which had been removed from the éwolé and placed on the altar on which strongly scented plants were burned. During the night the ancestors appeared and gave him a cognomen and imposed one or more new taboos (at the same time he was relieved of certain prohibitions connected with age). Apparently it was during this initiation that his individual totem was revealed (if it was indeed a totem).

769 This question of the totem is very poorly elucidated, in spite of 614 some 600 pages devoted to the subject by Father Trilles. He distinguishes between clan, segment, individual, family, and society 114 totems, etc. He also distinguishes a tutelary being, mvame, from the "effect of a tutelary being"; akam, an animal totem, from a dedicated animal or an incarnation of a man in an animal, etc. He